

## **Fire minister cancels talks with Fire Brigades Union**

Lead officials of the Fire Brigades Union have today received a letter from Westminster fire minister Penny Mordaunt, informing them that she considers the meeting scheduled to take place tomorrow at 9am to discuss the fire service pension dispute to have "fallen".

The FBU is set to take strike action over the eight days from Saturday 9 August. Having issued 9 days' notice of this action, more than is statutorily required, the FBU was hopeful that the talks arranged for tomorrow might have produced enough movement to allow strike action to be suspended. That opportunity looks now to have been squandered by the government's decision to cancel the talks.

Andy Dark, FBU assistant general secretary, said: "We are absolutely astounded that the minister has written to the union today, less than 24 hours before the talks are due to take place, to suggest that the meeting has "fallen". This is a complete misrepresentation of the fact that the minister has cancelled the meeting. The minister has scuppered an opportunity where there was potential to find a solution that could have meant there would be no need for planned strikes to take place.

"On 31 July, the fire minister wrote an open letter to all firefighters in England saying that progress could only be made through dialogue. In that letter she said '*[I] have made it clear to the FBU that I would be happy to receive any representations they wish to make to me even during industrial action.*' With this latest letter the minister has reneged on her assurance given to every firefighter in England.

"She mistakenly thought we had called off talks – an error on her part which we gladly corrected in unequivocal terms in our letter to her the following day.

"We feel that the minister has let down the government, her department, the local fire services and the public". Penny Mordaunt is the third fire minister in the four years of this government and this is the first time any talks with the FBU have been cancelled.

"We hear a lot of talk from ministers in this government that they believe unions should strike less and talk more. The minister has today reinforced the reasons why there is a necessity for trade unions members to take strike action.

"With the minister cancelling the talks, and more importantly, there being no fresh proposals from government, these strikes will go ahead.

"The union is always keen to talk and will not allow the government's decision to hinder or alter our willingness to discuss government proposals to bring about a resolution to this dispute.

"The union will contact the minister again today, as we did on 1 August in an attempt to get the meeting tomorrow back on track."